



February 2, 2022

Senator Jeb Bradley, Chairman
Senate Health and Human Services Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 101
33 N. State Street
Concord, NH 03301

Submitted via email to Jeb.Bradley@leg.state.nh.us, James.Gray@leg.state.nh.us,
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RE: SB 422: establishing an adult dental benefit under the state Medicaid program

Dear Chairman Bradley and members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding SB 422. Bi-State Primary Care Association is grateful for the attention the sponsors are giving to ensuring access to dental care for adult Medicaid recipients. We respectfully request the committee recommend SB 422 ought to pass.

Bi-State Primary Care Association (Bi-State) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, representing 28 member organizations across New Hampshire and Vermont that provide comprehensive primary care services to over 300,000 patients at 146 locations. Our members include community health centers (CHCs), federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), rural health clinics (RHCs), area health education center programs, and Planned Parenthood of Northern New England. New Hampshire's community health centers provide integrated primary care, substance use disorder treatment, behavioral health, and oral health services to approximately 112,000 patients, including 1 in 4 of *all* Granite Staters enrolled in the Medicaid program.¹

CHCs are leaders in meeting the needs of communities with limited access to health care, including dental care. In 2020, CHCs delivered oral health services on-site, in schools, and through mobile clinics, to ~9,000 Granite Staters who made ~19,000 oral health visits. Many CHCs, such as Coos County Family Health Services and Mid-State Health Center, are the *only* providers in their geographical areas that deliver much-needed primary and oral health care. Their clinician teams, who provide a range of services "all under one roof," see firsthand the

¹ Statewide data from Kaiser Family Foundation: <http://kff.org/other/state-indicator/total-population>, BPHC 2020 UDS Summary Reports, and Self-Reported data in Bi-State Primary Care Association member surveys.

long-term damage to a person's overall physical and mental health when they do not seek dental care until it is too late, because they could not afford treatment in the short term.

The current New Hampshire Medicaid Dental Benefit is "Emergency Only." This means that coverage for adults only includes antibiotics for infection, narcotics/pharmaceuticals for pain, and removing diseased and damaged teeth: No cleanings, fillings, or restorations for preventative care are included. As a result, many Medicaid beneficiaries seek treatment in the hospital emergency departments, where commonly patients' damaged teeth are extracted because their preventative oral health issues remained unaddressed.

Bi-State and our members believe the development of the Adult Dental Medicaid Benefit is an economic investment. Untreated dental conditions eventually lead to pain and tooth loss that lower quality of life, jeopardize employment and financial mobility, and contribute to unnecessary emergency visits that are exorbitantly costly to the health care system. A study in the *Journal of the American Dental Association* identified \$2.7 billion in dental-related hospital emergency department visits in the U.S. over a three-year period: 40% of those visits were by uninsured individuals, and 30% percent were by Medicaid-enrolled adults.² The benefit will also help incentivize more dentists throughout the state to open their doors to Medicaid patients, thereby improving treatment capacity.

SB 422 is the result of years of collaboration among the Department of Health and Human Services, legislators, public health dentists, insurance carriers, and Medicaid beneficiaries. Bi-State and our community health center members strongly support SB 422 and respectfully request the committee recommend SB 422 ought to pass.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or would like more information.

Sincerely,

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² *Medicaid Adult Dental Benefits: An Overview*. Center for Health Care Strategies, Inc., 2019, https://www.chcs.org/media/Adult-Oral-Health-Fact-Sheet_091519.pdf